

Chapter VIII

Agriculture

Overview

According to the Secretariat for Agricultural Development (Secretaría de Fomento Agropecuario–SEFOA) of Baja California, about two hundred thousand people in Baja California earn their living from agriculture. The average wage ranges between one and two minimum wages. The greatest problem that farmers in the arid Baja California peninsula have to deal with is the scarcity of water. Without irrigation, the extensive cultivation of vegetables, grain crops, and fruit would be impossible. The major cultivation areas in Baja California include the coastal zone from Tijuana to Ensenada, the Ojos Negros valley, the San Vicente region, the San Quintín region, and the Mexicali Valley. In Baja California Sur, the only important agriculturally productive land is found around Ciudad Constitución.

Both Baja California and Baja California Sur produce a large variety of crops. The major cyclical crops in Baja California include red tomatoes, grain wheat, spring onions, strawberries, seed cotton, cucumber, lettuce, onions, fodder sorghum, and green tomatoes. The most important perennial crops are alfalfa (green alfalfa and *alfalfa achicalada*), asparagus, grapes, flowers, dates, and bermuda grass seeds. Baja California is listed as Mexico's number one producer of red tomatoes, spring onions, flowers, dates, and bermuda grass. Baja California Sur produces smaller quantities of crops than the northern peninsula. However, the state is still one of Mexico's main producers of red tomatoes, grain chickpeas, cherry tomatoes, basil, strawberries, asparagus, *alfalfa achicalada*, fruit trees, and figs.

Environmental Projects in Baja California

Mexico's Secretariat for Agriculture, Cattle, Fishing, and Food (Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería Rural, Pesca y Alimentación—SAGARPA) is clearly focusing on rural development rather than environmental projects. However, there are a few projects underway in Baja California that are related to the environment. These projects are carried out by the Secretariat for the Development of Agriculture and Fishing (Secretaría de Fomento Agropecuario—SEFOA) of Baja California with the goal of supporting the growth and sustainability of the agricultural producers in Baja California.

Most of the programs deal with water issues because the scarcity of water is one of the major challenges for agricultural growth in the region. Due to the high salinity of water delivered to northern Baja California from the Colorado River, one of the environmental focuses of SEFOA—in coordination with National Water Commission (Comisión Nacional del Agua—CNA)—is improving the quality of water used in agriculture in Baja California. SEFOA is also working on the remediation of high-salinity agricultural soils. According to the agency's estimates, approximately 25 to 30 percent of the Mexicali region's total agricultural land faces severe salinity problems. Although 50,000 hectares need to be treated, only 2,200 hectares (4.4%) have been recovered over the last five years.

Another of SEFOA's priorities is the recharging of aquifers in the coastal zone (Valle de Guadalupe, Ensenada, Ojos Negros, and San Quintín regions) of Baja California where wells are the primary source of agricultural water. According to SEFOA, this problem could lead to a serious water crisis within the next 20 to 30 years. The construction of surface water barriers slows the flow of water and allows its retention, which helps to recharge the wells. There are also some pilot programs underway that promote agricultural water conservation. These programs are carried out in cooperation with SAGARPA.

To prevent the accumulation of solid wastes such as agricultural plastics and organics from clogging runoff drainage systems, SEFOA is also focusing on agricultural waste management. In addition, the agency is responsible for

reforestation and fire prevention programs in some of the forested areas in Baja California. The forest management activities are actually the only environmental projects that fall under SEFOA's direct responsibility.

Companies that seek to become a supplier to SEFOA, must first register with the government of Baja California. Another option, however, are direct contracts with private agricultural producers. For more information on SEFOA and its projects, contact Lic. Candelario López at (52-686) 555-4930.